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The Able Minister.

A

S E R M O N,

Preached in *Broad-mead,*

BEFORE THE

Bristol Education Society,

AUGUST 18, 1773.

By HUGH EVANS, M. A. H

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Adolescentes, sacrae scripturae candidati, urgendi, ut, sacrarum linguarum cognitionem studiis suis adjiciant, non quasi πάτριος, sed instar FUNDAMENTI in mentium suarum fundum submittant.

Dico, non posse vere dici THEOLOGUM, qui in hebraicis literis mediocriter non fit instructus. Pastor Evang. p. 77.

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2 COR. iii. 6.

Who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit.

AMIDST the great variety of distinguishing privileges with which our happy land hath long been indulged, there is no one of equal value with that of a gospel ministry. Other blessings relate to the body and time only; the gospel and the ministry of it, to the soul and eternity. What then can have so just a claim to our warmest gratitude, as the enjoyment of the ministry of the gospel? And if a *gospel ministry* be so important, how desirable must it be to have *able ministers* of the new testament; persons thoroughly furnished for the great, the arduous work? Such ministers the church at *Corinth* was blessed with; nor this church alone, but also all the churches who enjoyed the benefit of the *apostles* labors; for they were all *able ministers* of the new testament. And blessed be God, though the gospel is ministred now by those who are greatly inferior to the apostles, yet there are some in our day, whom God

hath made, and who may and ought therefore to be esteemed, *able ministers* of the gospel. And with a view to assist the serious and hopeful in acquiring, under God, this important and desirable character, the Society to which I have the honor of addressing myself upon the present occasion was originally constituted. You are ready, my brethren, I am fully persuaded, to acknowledge with the apostle in our text, that the work is the Lord's, and that it is he alone who makes or can make *able ministers* of the new testament. But as he is pleased to make use of instruments to effect his own purposes, the honor *you* are ambitious of, is that of being employed by him, in the accomplishment of the great and desirable work of raising up *able ministers* of the gospel. And there is the greater reason for our being solicitous about this matter in the present day, as able ministers are much wanted. The harvest truly is plenteous, but able laborers very few. There are moreover many able and indefatigable adversaries of the gospel, and great need therefore of able and zealous ministers to vindicate and establish the truth as it is in Jesus.

The apostle in the context, asserts and vindicates the divine mission and ministry of himself and his brethren, against those false judaizing teachers in that day who endeavored to degrade and expose them. *We are not*, says the apostle, Chap. ii. v. 17. *as many which corrupt the word*
of

of God ; but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ. He goes on, Ch. 3. Do we begin again to commend ourselves ? Or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you ? As though he had said, no ; Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men ; forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministred BY US, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God ; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. And such trust have we through Christ to Godward. But then, lest any should think he assumed too much in what he had said, he adds ; Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to think any thing as of ourselves ; but our sufficiency is of God. Then come in the words of our text. Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit.

In improving this subject, I shall endeavor .

I. To describe one whom God hath made an able minister of the new testament.

II. Shew how, or in what respects, it appears to be God who makes men able ministers.

III. Close with some suitable improvement.

I. I am to describe one whom God hath made an able minister of the new testament.

The

The word *ἐνδύωσεν*, here rendered *able*, properly signifies *fit* or *sufficient*, as it is rendered chap. ii. ver. 16. and is manifestly intended to describe or represent, a person that is properly qualified for the work of the ministry. One that well understands the various and extensive duties of the sacred office, and has such talents and abilities as furnish him, in a good degree, for the discharge of them.

Now to constitute such a minister, many important qualifications are necessary. And in proportion to the *measure* any minister has of these qualifications, he may be denominated, in a greater or less degree, an *able minister*.

1. A competent share of the gifts of nature is absolutely necessary to form the character of an *able minister*.

Without a tolerable share of natural endowments, there can be no foundation on which, without the interposition of a miracle, any considerable superstructure can be raised, much less that of an *able minister*. Though cultivation may assist and improve nature, it cannot compensate for her defects.

Here, were I to descend into particulars, I might observe, that a good constitution, and a moderate degree of bodily strength and health, seem highly requisite to form the character of an *able minister*. "They greatly mistake the matter, " who look upon the ministry as an indolent kind
" of

“ of employment. It may be so to those, who
 “ think they have discharged all the duties of it,
 “ when they have filled up two or three hours of
 “ one day in the week, with some general talk
 “ upon subjects they have not studied or taken
 “ any pains about; and thrown away the other
 “ days in idle and fruitless visits from house to
 “ house. But I am sure, if it be duly and con-
 “ scientiously attended to, it will be found to be a
 “ very painful and laborious service. Many a
 “ healthful constitution has been pulled down by
 “ it.” * It is the duty of ministers to give close
 application to meditation, reading, writing, con-
 versation with a variety of persons and upon a
 variety of subjects, besides attending to the more
 immediate exercises of religion both in public and
 private, such as prayer, preaching, and adminis-
 tring the sacred Institutions of Baptism and the
 Lord’s Supper; and how much these exercises try
 the constitution, many that were once robust and
 strong can painfully testify. Some indeed only
 by a few years employ in this arduous service,
 have fallen early victims to death and the grave.

But a *sound mind*, let me observe, is requisite to
 form an able minister, as well as a sound healthful
 body. *Mens sana, in corpore sano*; a sound well-
 formed capacious mind, in a sound healthful body.
 A clear and quick perception, a lively imagina-
 tion,

* See the CHARGE, by Dr. Stennett, at the ordination of the
 Rev. C. Evans.

tion, a retentive memory, a solid judgment, a good invention, fortitude and courage, prudence and patience, mildness and affability, tenderness and compassion, with a variety of other mental endowments of a like nature, are, I apprehend, not only very *desirable* qualifications for the work of the ministry, but absolutely *necessary* to constitute, in the full sense of that phrase, an *able minister*.—I might further observe, that a good degree of natural elocution, a capacity of speaking freely and intelligibly, or what the Apostle calls a *door of utterance*, is also necessary to the ministerial character. These qualifications are given indeed in various degrees to different ministers, as it pleaseth the great Giver of every good and perfect gift to impart them. *Moses* was slow of speech, but in other respects remarkably qualified for the work to which he was called. *Aaron* could *speak well*, but in other endowments was inferior to *Moses*. The apostle *Paul* was *rude in speech*, but in knowledge, and the powers of reasoning, and strong forcible language, he was without his equal. His letters and sermons were weighty and powerful. *Apollos* was a man of *eloquence*, but in other endowments not to be compared with *Paul*. But still, that a man can never attain to the character of an *able minister*, without a competent share of the gifts of nature, though some may be blessed with these gifts in a larger and others in a less degree; is a truth so evident, that it would be a mere abuse
of

of time to pretend to enter upon the formal proof of it.—If the great sages of antiquity had not been endowed with considerable natural powers, can it be thought they would have ever been men of such eminence in their various professions? Or that those great and worthy men who have done honor to the *sacred function*, would have been able to have filled up the duties of their station in the manner they have done, had they not been blessed with good natural endowments?

The apostles, though they lived in the age of miracles, when those supernatural powers were communicated which more than compensated for every other defect, yet appear to have been all of them men of good natural understanding. When we are told that God hath chosen the *weak things of this world*, and the *foolish things*, to confound the wise and mighty, we are not to suppose that he hath chosen literally, *idiots*, men void of natural sense and understanding; but only such as were *so esteemed* by the men of this world, to whom the *wisdom of God* is foolishness. Or perhaps the meaning may be that they were *weak* and *foolish* with respect to the wisdom of this world, falsely so called; that they were unacquainted with those arts and stratagems, upon which the worldly wise are ready so much to value themselves, and by which they secure the regards of unthinking mistaken men. The apostles were men of plain good sense, integrity and simplicity; and yet, to the

confounding of the worldly wise and mighty, their preaching was made the wisdom of God, and the power of God unto salvation. But further,

2. To constitute an *able minister* in the present day, the improvements of *human learning*, seem highly desirable, if not absolutely necessary.

This point may be argued,

1. From the present state of human nature.

Does the barren state of the earth teach the husbandman to use all the arts of cultivation to enrich and improve the soil, and render it fruitful? Should not the state of the mind, much more lead us to the use of all the improvements to be derived from learning? It seems to be altogether as unreasonable, to expect good fruit from an uncultivated soil, as any thing considerable from an uncultivated genius*. In the present degenerate state of human nature, knowledge is not to be expected by intuition; and the days of inspiration are ceased. If a man therefore would be wise and knowing, he must read and study. Accordingly we find that even in the days of the apostles, *Timothy* who was an Evangelist, an *extraordinary minister*, is yet exhorted to give attendance to *reading*, not to *neglect*, but to cultivate and improve the gift that was in him, to *meditate*, and finally, to *give himself* to

* Ut ager, uamvis fertilis, sine cultura fructuosus esse non potest: sic sine doctrina animus. *Ælian.* l. 12. c. 56.

to his work, that his *profiting* might appear to all. 1 Tim. iv. 13, 14, 15. Now it is evident from hence that *supernatural endowments*, even when communicated in an extraordinary way, were not designed to supersede, or discourage from the pursuit of useful knowledge, in the common and ordinary method. The apostle *Paul* seems to have had no idea that *reading* and *study*, would suppose that we thought we could *help* or *mend* the work of the Spirit of God, which by some has been compared to painting a diamond; but that *this* is the design of human learning, is the discovery of *later* ages. It may perhaps be said, that however, though ministers are to read and study when actually entered upon the ministry, yet this does not authorize a man's going through what is called a course of preparatory study, *before* he enters upon the ministry. To this I answer, it is one of the most obvious and unquestionable dictates of common sense, that we may safely argue from the greater to the less. If therefore, those who are called to the actual and immediate discharge of the ministerial office, and are deemed capable of the duties of it, are yet exhorted to *read, study*, and *neglect* not the gift that is in them; how much *more* must this be thought necessary before a man *first* engages in the work, and must therefore be less capable of the duties of it than we can suppose him to be afterwards. Besides, if
a man

a man when he is a minister is to *read* and *study*, then surely he ought *before* he enters upon the ministry, to be *able* to read and study. And if he is to *read* and *study* the holy scriptures, surely it must be very desirable to be able to read them in the languages in which they were wrote, without being obliged to view them through the medium of fallible and varying translations; and to be acquainted with those ancient customs and usages, with other branches of learning, whereby he may be the better able to understand, explain and defend them. Upon the whole, if a *Timothy*, an extraordinary minister, was yet to pursue useful knowledge in an ordinary way; how much more must this be incumbent upon us who are so much, in every respect, his inferiors? And if *reading* and *study* be in themselves necessary in order to constitute an able minister, unless it can be made to appear there is a particular time, place, and method for the pursuit of this reading and study, ascertained in the word of God, is it not as frivolous to tell us, that it is unlawful to read and study *before* we enter upon the ministry, or to go to any College or Academy, in order the more effectually to be assisted in a course of reading and study; as it would be to affirm, that we must never study in a morning, but only in an afternoon, or that we must never study in a chamber or closet, but only in the field, or on the road? In short, that tho' we

we ought to pursue knowledge, yet that we should do it in the least advantageous and effectual method we can possibly devise ?

2. The importance of human learning to a minister, may be further argued from the nature and extent of the work to which he is called.

Some professions and occupations require much less knowledge than others ; but there is perhaps no function which requires so much, as that of an able minister. Whoever reads the bible with the least degree of attention, must be sensible that there is every kind of knowledge laid up in it ; natural, historical, moral, civil and other kinds of knowledge, as well as that which is more immediately theological or religious. Now it is the work and business of an able minister, not merely to read and meditate upon the several things which are contained in the bible, in the capacity of a private Christian, and for his own particular advantage ; but it is his province to explain and illustrate to others those things which may be hard to be understood, to defend the cause of God and truth against those who may oppose it, and to seek out for acceptable words, as well as arguments, whereby the great and important truths of God may be most effectually impressed upon the minds of men. But can this be done, without a considerable compass of knowledge and learning ? And if knowledge is not now to be expected by inspiration, how are we to attain it, but in the diligent

ligent use of the best means providence may furnish us with for that purpose ? I might easily shew the desirableness and importance of acquired knowledge, from a view of the various other branches of the ministerial work ; but to an unprejudiced mind, it must be, I think, self-evident. Indeed so arduous did the work appear, even to an inspired apostle, that he cried out, *who is sufficient for these things ?* But perhaps it may be said, *our sufficiency is of God.* And it certainly is so ; as we shall hereafter more fully shew. All our natural endowments, and all our acquired furniture, are from him, nor will either the one or the other be of any avail, without his influence and blessing. But if knowledge is necessary to a minister, should he not pursue after it ? And if *means* are to be used in order to communicate knowledge to others, doth not common sense teach us to use the best means which are in our power, such as appear to be best adapted to answer the end ? May we not as well expect to walk without feet, to speak without a tongue, or to perform the various functions of life without life itself, as to work without means, or means which are not adapted to the end ? We know that the great God can effect his own purposes without any means, as he did in creation, when he only spake and it was done ; or by means the most inconsiderable and improbable, as when our blessed Lord restored sight to the blind by applying clay to his eyes ; yet as it is not
 the

the pleasure of God to work in this manner, in common, having given to men various powers, and directed them to improve and use them for various purposes of human life and religion; it must be our duty so to do, and it is in so doing, we may hope for the divine concurrence and blessing.

3. The pursuit of useful knowledge stands recommended to us by the conduct of wise and good men in all ages, and has the sanction even of the infinitely wise God, and the great Redeemer.

The Lacedemonian state had such a sense of the importance of a good education, that they took the charge of educating their youth upon themselves; lest the parents, through an overfondness, should neglect, or but superficially attend to this important business. And amongst the people of God themselves, we find there were very early *schools of the prophets*. These schools, the learned Dr. *Lightfoot* observes, * “ were little
“ universities and colleges of students. For their
“ governor they had some venerable prophet,
“ inspired with the holy Spirit, and that partook
“ of divine revelations. The scholars were not in-
“ spired indeed with the same prophetic spirit,
“ but received prophecies from the mouth of
“ their Master. He revealed to them, those
“ things which were revealed unto him, of the will
“ of

* *Lightfoot's Works*. Vol. 2. page 85.

“ of God and the state of the people, of the times
 “ and events of Israel, and, above all, of the mys-
 “ teries of the gospel ; of the Messias, of his com-
 “ ing, times, death, resurrection, and those things
 “ that were to be done by him. In these small uni-
 “ versities, the prophets who prophesied of the
 “ grace that should come, (as the apostle *Peter*
 “ speaks) *enquired diligently* of salvation, searching
 “ what or what manner of time that was, which
 “ was pointed out by the Spirit of Christ that was
 “ in them, when he foretold the sufferings of
 “ Christ and the glory that should follow. These
 “ things, which were not to be fetched out by the
 “ meer study of the law, were here taught, and so
 “ the study of the law and gospel together ren-
 “ dered the minister of the divine word complete.”
 The *synagogues*, it is supposed, succeeded these
 seminaries, after the Babylonish captivity, and the
 schools of such as *Hillel*, *Gamaliel*, at whose feet
Paul was educated, and others. It is indeed cer-
 tain that in every age, and under every dispen-
 sation, places have been provided for the instruc-
 tion of youth, and encouraged and countenanced
 by the wisest and best of men. Who have been
 more zealous patrons of sound learning, and the
 seats of learning, or more eminent for learning
 themselves, than those godly puritanical ministers
 in this kingdom, who were an ornament to the
 church of God whilst they lived, and whose ex-
 cellent works so much edify and comfort us, now
 they

they are dead? The seminaries of learning have been, it must be owned, greatly abused by carnal men, and the work of the ministry has been by many, too much considered in the unworthy light of a meer *trade* to obtain a decent livelihood. And what is there which has not been abused? But we cannot argue from the *abuse* of learning, against the *use* of it; and it is for the humble subordinate *use* of it alone, I am pleading.

And let seminaries of learning be decried ever so much, they may boast of the greatest sanction that can possibly be given them, even that of the great God. He has been pleased to raise up in every age many eminent and worthy men out of these seminaries. From the ancient schools of the prophets, there were some raised up who were men of renown; and from later institutions of this kind, how many able ministers have been brought forth to supply the church of God? Of this number we may reckon the glorious instruments of the *Reformation*; the truly learned and godly *puritans*, the fathers of the present Dissenters; the many learned spiritual and zealous clergymen who are, in our day, the ornaments of the church of England; and, may I not add, the most able, acceptable, and useful of the dissenting clergy in general. And if God be for us, who can, successfully, be against us?

To all this I would subjoin, we have the *example* of the Son of God himself, to countenance us as

to this matter. When he was but twelve years of age, he was in the midst of the Doctors, we read, in the temple, *hearing, and asking them questions.* Luke ii 46. And what were the *twelve*, and the *seventy* disciples, but *pupils* to their divine master, in like manner as *John's* disciples were to him. And accordingly we find our blessed Lord frequently giving his disciples *lectures* or instructions about many things. Now *He* was a teacher sent of God, and he could, if he had seen fit so to do, have effectually supplied his disciples with all the knowledge that was necessary for them, in an immediate and miraculous way ; but we see he chose to do it in the common and ordinary method of instruction ; hereby setting us, in this respect as well as in many others, an *example* that we should tread in his steps. And indeed, what minister is there of any standing in the church of God, but has those who, in a more stated or occasional way, come to him for instruction ? Especially such as may be thought to have promising talents for the ministry. And if it be lawful to give instruction, why should any particular mode of giving it be objected to ; especially such a mode as may appear to be the most effectual and advantageous ?

4. The importance and desirableness of human learning, may be further argued from the happy effects produced by it, when sanctified, and humbly devoted to the service of God.

It is to *human learning*, under God, let men who
have

have it not affect as much as they will to despise it, we are indebted for an *English bible*. A consideration, which one would think could not but restrain the petulance of those mistaken men, who seem to take an *envious pleasure* * in speaking evil of that which they do not understand. Had God been pleased to *inspire* men with the gift of tongues in a miraculous way, as he did at the beginning, he could doubtless have done it, and might hereby have had the bible translated into different languages. But he has seen fit to make use of *human learning* for this purpose. And how therefore, without human learning, a man could become an *able minister* for this great and important service to the church, we may challenge the adversaries of human learning to tell us.—It is moreover to human learning in a great measure, we are indebted, under God, for those valuable commentaries, and expositions of the scriptures, which have been so eminently useful to the people of God in every age.—The excellent apologies which have been published in defence of Christianity, the elaborate treatises which have been wrote upon the various

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doctrines

* The temper discovered by some of those who endeavor to *distinguish* themselves by railing against human learning, seems not unlike that of *Diogenes*, who, when he trampled upon *Plato's* embroidered cloak, cried out, *Sic calco fastum Platonis*, thus trample I upon the pride of *Plato*; to whom *Plato* very properly replied, *Sed majore fastu*, but with greater pride, for he was prouder in treading upon it, than *Plato* was in wearing it.

doctrines of the gospel, and other branches of our holy religion, are likewise to be ascribed, under God, to the same source. And further, it is by the help of human learning we are enabled to see with *our own eyes*, to judge of the propriety and justness of the *translation* of the scriptures into our own language, the better to understand the *literal* meaning of the scriptures, to enter into the spirit of the various reasonings contained in them, and to perceive and display their force, energy and beauty. For none of these things are now done in a *miraculous* way, but in the use of those faculties, and those means of improvement, which God is pleased to furnish us with in the ordinary course of his providence. So sensible of the usefulness and importance of learning, were those eminent reformers, *Luther*, and his amiable successor *Melancthon*, that they express themselves in the strongest manner concerning it. * “ Although my knowledge of the Hebrew be small, says *Luther*, yet I would not exchange it for *all the treasures of the whole world*.” And says *Melancthon*, † “ I know I have
have

* “ Quamvis exigua sit mea linguæ hebraicæ notitia, cum omnibus tamen totius mundi gazis non commutarem.” *Tom. 4. Orat. p. 471.*

† Scio me vix labris primis degussasse hebraicas, græcas, et latinas literas; sed tamen hoc ipsum quod didici, quantulumcumque est, propter judicium de religione, omnibus mundi regnis, omniumque opibus, longe antepono. *In loc. com. lit. de ling. scrip. sanct.*

have scarce tasted with my first lips, the Hebrew, Greek and Latin letters, but nevertheless that which I have learnt, how little soever it be, for the sake of the judgment of religion, I far prefer it *to all the kingdoms of the world, and to all the riches of them.*" And amongst many other qualifications therefore, which are necessary to the discharge of the ministerial office, a celebrated writer observes, that a christian pastor "*ought to be well versed in every kind of literature.*"* Nor is there, indeed, any branch of literature but may be highly serviceable to a minister, if truly sanctified, in one part or other of his sacred office; or which has not been actually made use of, through the agency of the good Spirit of God, to great advantage.

5. The ingenuous acknowledgments of those worthy men, who have been themselves destitute of the advantages of learning, may be appealed to in its favor.

Such have been the great natural abilities, and the eminent supernatural gifts of some truly great and good men, and such their close application to reading and study, when they have been called to the work of the ministry, that without the aid of previous learning, they have become burning
and

* Quæ in munere capeffendo pastori adesse debunt, hæc sunt.
1. Debet esse παντιςµων, omnigena literatura imbutus. Past.
evang. pag. 76.

and shining lights, and approved themselves to be *able ministers* of the new testament. Of this character was that venerable apostle of the day in which he lived, the celebrated Mr. *Bunyan*, and in the same class may be ranked many excellent ministers now living, whose names I should with pleasure mention, were it not that it might be thought to have the appearance of flattery. Many I am sensible, who have enjoyed the utmost advantages with respect to literature, are yet greatly inferior to some who have never enjoyed such advantages. But are we from hence to argue, that human learning is needless? Certainly not. Because some men have been *born* philosophers, is the *study* of philosophy to be abandoned? Because others have been born poets, are the works of the poets, or the art of poetry, to be neglected? Or because some who have enjoyed the advantages of a good education, have yet made no improvement of them; is a good education therefore to be despised or lightly esteemed? What can be more preposterous! Nor have those excellent ministers, who, without the aid of learning, have been made the most eminently useful, argued in this unreasonable manner. On the other hand, by a humble and diligent use of the works of their more learned brethren, and by close application and study, they have endeavored to compensate for their own want of learning, acknowledging at the same time the necessity and importance of it

where

where it can be attained, and encouraging those who have an opportunity for the attainment of it, by all means to pursue it, with thankfulness, zeal, and diligence.

And were I to take notice of the absurd opposition some have made to human learning, their weak and indecent sneers at all endeavors to enlarge and improve the human mind; and their own attempts at the same time to mimic or counterfeit something like learning, together with the *ambition* they discover, to be thought *purser*, and in every respect *better* than their learned brethren; it would, I think, add some weight to the arguments already produced upon this subject. But as I apprehend further enlargement is unnecessary, I shall close the present head of discourse, with the following pertinent passage from a sermon of the late truly evangelical as well as learned Mr. *Matthew Clarke*. In shewing how it is God hath made foolish the wisdom of this world, he thus expresses himself. “Not by destroying the
 “exercise of reason, or the use of learning; as if
 “the holiest men must needs be the greatest *fools*:
 “reason and religion are at no such odds, that
 “they cannot consist together. There’s no occasion
 “for men to lay aside their learning, when
 “they enter into Christ’s school; nor are they required
 “to abandon all just reasoning and argumentation,
 “as carnal and useless things, when
 “they come to know the truth as it is in Jesus.
 “The

“ The converting men to christianity don’t turn
 “ them into fools and idiots. No ! these things
 “ are excellent in themselves, and may be made
 “ very serviceable to religion, whilst they act mi-
 “ nisterially, and serve as an hand-maid, to at-
 “ tend upon and open the word, though without
 “ this they are all weak and defective. They are
 “ gifts of God, and as the spoils of the *Egyptians*
 “ were dedicated to the service of the tabernacle,
 “ may be of singular use to the church. In the
 “ first planting of the gospel, God made little use
 “ of these things ; the want of them being suppli-
 “ ed by extraordinary gifts and immediate inspi-
 “ ration ; without learning the apostles were able
 “ to speak in *divers tongues*. But when no such
 “ immediate inspiration can be expected or pre-
 “ tended to, it must be great weakness to suppose
 “ that God, by making foolish the wisdom of this
 “ world, has destroyed either the exercise of
 “ reason, or the necessity and usefulness of learn-
 “ ing. No man can discredit human learning,
 “ but he must at the same time disparage his own
 “ understanding. *Its an attempt, says an ingeni-*
 “ *person,* that would be impracticable ; because if*
 “ *well done, it must be by arguments drawn from the*
 “ *storehouse of learning ; and then at the same time we*
 “ *are reasoning against it, we are really arguing for it,*
 “ *and prove the usefulness of what we pretend to decry.*
 “ *If it’s ill done, and the performance be unlearned, it’s*
 “ to

* Preface to reflections on human learning.

“ to no purpose, and might as well have been let alone,
 “ and shews withal the need of what we are denying.
 “ But then it may be too much magnified, and is
 “ so when men are fond of their learning, to the
 “ loss of their religion. It must not be suffered
 “ to usurp, but taught its duty, and kept in its
 “ place.”

Upon the whole, though human learning may have been, and doubtless has been, in common with all other things, greatly abused; yet, it appears in itself highly desirable, useful, and necessary, in order to the forming of an *able minister* of the new testament.

But, not the greatest natural endowments, nor the best acquired abilities, will alone complete this important character. There is something yet more essential than any thing of this nature, and without which, have what we will besides, we are nothing. Which leads me to observe,

3. That to constitute an able minister, divine and supernatural gifts are absolutely necessary.

In the apostolic age these gifts were dispensed in an extraordinary way, particularly on the day of Pentecost. See Acts ii. 1, 2, 3, 4. But though such extraordinary communications are not now to be expected, since there is not that necessity for them there was then, yet still we are encouraged now to look to an ascended Jesus, for those divine and supernatural gifts, which are necessary to the work of the ministry. He hath, we read,

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obtained

obtained gifts for men, and *gives pastors and teachers*, as well as apostles, prophets, and evangelists, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. The first of these gifts is the gift of *grace*; without which, let a man have the finest natural talents, and the largest fund of human learning, he can be no other than a blind leader of the blind. Nor is there any thing relative to the church of Christ more to be deplored, than the introducing of carnal unconverted persons into the ministry. The *natural man*, receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he *know* them, because they are spiritually discerned. 1 Cor. ii. 14. And if he does not *know* them himself, how can he be qualified to teach them unto others? But not only is the gift of *grace* necessary to the character of an able minister; but there are various other gifts which appear absolutely necessary, in order to the due discharge of the ministerial office. It is not every *good* man, any more than every *sensible* and *learned* man, that is properly qualified to be an *able minister* of the new testament*. As men have oftentimes a peculiar *genius* for

* "He must have a *ministerial gift*, which is not *natural parts*, nor *human learning*, nor *grace in common* with other christians, which though ALL NEEDFUL AND USEFUL, yet neither of them separately, nor altogether will qualify a man to be a public teacher of the word. He must have a special and peculiar gift from Christ, &c." See Dr. Gill's Body of Divinity, vol. 3. p. 262.

for one profession or occupation rather than another, so there seems to be a kind of *divine genius*, if I may so express it, necessary to qualify a man for the work of the ministry. Whatever abilities a man has, whether natural or acquired, it is necessary, in order to his being a minister, that he be for instance, *disposed* and *inclined* to use his talents and abilities in the service of the sanctuary, to devote them to the work of the christian ministry. It is also necessary, not only that he be *inclined* to the work; but, that he should be in other respects, *fitted* for it. That he should have a good degree of light, or divine illumination into the scriptures, a facility or readiness in explaining them, and freedom of speech, or a *door of utterance* in speaking of divine things. In short, it seems peculiarly necessary, that a minister should be, as the apostle *Paul* expresses it, 1 *Tim.* iii. 2. *doctrinarius, apt to teach*, that is endowed with a *capacity* and *disposition* for this employment rather than any other. He should have an unction from above, be led by the spirit into all truth, have the tongue of the spiritually learned, that he may know how to speak a word in season to weary souls, and possess the sacred skill, as an instrument in God's hand, to win souls to Christ, and rightly to divide the word of truth. And where the great head of the church is pleased to dispense these gifts to any of his servants; he seems, in my humble opinion, to point them out as proper persons

sons to be called to, and employed in public work. And these, I would observe, are the only persons encouraged by this institution to enter upon the work of the ministry. These and no others, are the persons we desire to cherish and patronize, and to whom we would willingly afford all the assistance we can, in the pursuit of such useful knowledge, as may, with the blessing of God, the better enable them to discharge the duties of the office to which they are called. And if *this* deserves to be branded with the reproach of an impious attempt to mend or help the work of the Spirit of God, so then must the use of *means* in general, in order to the accomplishment of any *end*, and so, in a particular manner, must be the instructions, counsel and advice, which any aged minister may give to a young minister, or to one who is about to be called to the ministry; in a word, so must be, that *reading* and *study* to which *Paul* exhorts *Timothy*, that his *profiting* might appear to all.—As every good and perfect gift, so I believe *gifts* or talents for the *ministry* in an eminent manner, come down from above, from the Father of lights, the great dispenser of heavenly wisdom, and who giveth liberally without upbraiding. And though he dispenseth these gifts in different degrees, *giving to every man severally as he will*, 1 Cor. xii. 11, yet without a *measure* of them, we can never become *able ministers* of the new testament. But then we are not to *neglect*, but to stir up,

up, and, in the humble diligent use of all proper and suitable means, to improve the gifts, be they more or less, which may be communicated to us.

4. And lastly. An *able minister* of the new testament, must be a truly *evangelical* minister, or a minister *not of the letter, but of the spirit*.

This is particularly mentioned by the apostle in the words of our text. By the *letter* we are not to understand *learning*, or the *literal* meaning of the scripture. The apostle *Paul* was himself a *man of letters*, or learning, bred, as we have seen, at the feet of *Gamaliel*. And though the other apostles were *illiterate* before their call to the apostleship, yet they became afterwards men of *extraordinary learning*, being able to speak to persons of different nations, in their own different languages, the wonderful works of God. Acts ii. 6, 11. And were we to lay aside the *literal meaning* of scripture, what could we make of those many passages which *literally* speak of *Jesus Christ*, and the way of salvation by him? But by the *letter*, in our text, we are plainly to understand the *law*, or the Mosaic dispensation, and by the *spirit*, the *gospel*. The sequel of the apostle's reasoning evidently proves this to have been his meaning. He compares the Jewish and Christian dispensations together, and shews the superior glory of the latter to the former, calling the one, *the ministration of death and condemnation*, and the other, *the ministration of the spirit and of righteousness*. See ver. 7, 8, 9. An *able minister*

minister therefore of the new testament, is one that is not a *legal*, but a truly *evangelical* minister. One who is led into the true spirit of the gospel, who preaches Christ and him crucified, and, with our apostle, determines to make this the constant and chief subject of his ministrations. And such ministers, O how great a blessing to the church, and to the world! The Lord increase the number of them! But this leads me to the

II. Thing proposed, which was to shew how, or in what respects, it appears to be *God* who *makes men able ministers*. Our sufficiency, says the apostle, is of God, *who hath made us able ministers*. It is God, and he alone, who makes men able ministers of the new testament. Which appears from the following considerations.

1. They derive all their *abilities* for the work of the ministry from him.

He is the former of their bodies, and the father of their spirits, and to him therefore they are indebted for all their powers, both of body and mind. Have they a greater or less degree of bodily health and firmness; or have they any tolerable mental capacity? To God they are indebted both for the one and the other. Some we see who are, with respect to their minds, meer idiots, or but a little removed from this character; others are so oppressed with a variety of disorders and infirmities, that they know not scarcely what health means, from infancy to old age. Now are

we made in these respects to differ from many others? *Who* hath made us to differ, but that God, from whom every good gift cometh down?

And with respect to acquired abilities, are not these also from God? Is it not he that gives us parents, or raises up friends who are capable and disposed to afford us those advantages for the acquirement of useful knowledge, which others, perhaps, are destitute of? All our improvements are from him, as well as the powers themselves by which we are rendered capable of improvement. It was to a kind providence a *Moses* and a *Paul* were indebted for the superior advantages they enjoyed above many others. And to the same indulgent hand we should all be ready to ascribe the different opportunities and means of cultivation and mental improvement with which we may have been favored.

And as all our *natural* and *acquired* abilities are from God, so, in an especial manner, are those *supernatural* endowments which are necessary to constitute an able minister. It is he who *gives gifts*, ministerial gifts, to men. Every minister has peculiar reason to say, in the language of the apostle *Paul*, *by the grace of God I am what I am*. As a man, a scholar, a christian, a minister, by the *grace of God* I am what I am.

2. It is God that *calls* men to the work of the ministry.

As their qualifications for the work are all from him,

him, so is their call to it. Men are not to run without being sent, not to assume this honor to themselves; but to be called of God to it. It is mentioned to the reproach of the false prophets of old, that they ran without being sent. See *Jer. xxiii. 21. I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.* A defect in our *commission* is as material as a defect in our qualifications. Our blessed Lord, *glorified not himself* to be made an High Priest; but was called of God as was *Aaron*. *Heb. v. 4, 5.* The apostles *received their commission* from him. And it is he that *gives* to his church *pastors* and *teachers* now. A call to the ministry may be considered as being either *internal* or *external*. - The *internal* call consists in an inward capacity for it, and a humble willingness to engage in it, if regularly and duly called to it. An earnest *desire* to be useful to the souls of men; and if it be the will of God, to be made use of as an instrument of winning them to Christ.* And accordingly every minister that is ordained in the established church, declares his hope and trust, *that he is inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost*, to take upon him that office. The *external* call is the call of the church. Which call was anciently expressed or given by the voice, or the *holding up of hands*.

Thus

* Christus vocat interne, cum ecclesiæ ædificandæ desiderium et ardens, et ab omni avaritia et ambitione defæcatum, inspirat *Toto animæ desiderio venire* oportebat Levitam, qui, ut domino ministraret, admittendus. *Past. Ev. p. 2.*

Thus 2 Cor. viii. 19. the person who is spoken of as *chosen* or *called* by the churches to be a fellow traveller with the apostles, is said to be *χειροτονητός*, which word signifies one chosen or called by the holding up or stretching out of the hand. And it appears very plainly, that the church, or the members of every particular christian community, have always exercised this power of *choosing* or *calling* persons not only to the exercise of inferior offices in the church, but particularly to the office of the ministry. *

Where two or three are *gathered together*, says Christ, in my name, there *am I* in the midst of them. So that it may be truly said in this case, *vox populi vox est Dei*, the voice of the people is the voice of God. And if it is God who *calls* to the work as well as *qualifies* for it, surely it is he that can alone be said to *make* able ministers.

3. It is he that *assists* and *helps* them in their work.

As I was with Moses, says the Lord to *Joshua*, *so will I be with thee, I will not fail thee nor forsake thee.* *Josh. i. 5.* And in like manner, the encouraging language of Christ to his ministers in every age, is, *Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the*

E world!

* Ipsa plebs maxime habet potestatem, vel eligendi dignos sacerdotes, vel indignos recusandi. Quod et ipsum videmus de divina auctoritate descendere, ut sacerdos plebe præsente sub omnium oculis deligatur, et dignus atque idoneus publico judicio ac testimonio comprobetur.

Cypriani Opera. lib. 1. epist. 4.

world! *Matt. xxviii. 19.* Whatever ministers are, either with respect to their *inclination* or *ability* to read, study, minister the word, and attend every part of sanctuary service, they are what they are by the *grace* of God. It is he who gives them life, health, and strength both of body and mind, to perform the various and difficult services to which they are called; and it is he who enables them, amidst every discouragement, to persevere therein to the end. It is *HE* who makes them *able ministers*.

4. All their *success* is from God.

It is he who *giveth the increase*. He it was that succeeded the labors of the prophets and apostles, and made them instruments of so much good to the souls of men. And *He* it is that prospers all the attempts of his servants still, directing them to cast the gospel net on the *right side* of the ship, and making them truly wise, to win souls to Jesus Christ. If ministers are made able, as instruments, to convince and convert sinners, and to edify, establish and comfort the people of God; it is God that makes them so, and to him therefore should be ascribed all the glory. *Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the LORD GAVE to every man?* 1 Cor. iii. 5.

5. The promised *reward* of the able minister, is from God.

And the view, the prospect, the hope of this
reward,

reward, how pleasing, how delightful, how animating! What can have a more powerful influence, to render us able ministers of the new testament?

They that be wise, says the prophet Daniel, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.

Dan. xii. 3. And in the view of this glory, the apostle *Paul* exults saying, Henceforth there is laid up for *me*, a crown of righteousness. And whence did he expect this glorious crown? He says, which the *Lord*, the righteous judge shall give to *me* in that day, and not to *me only*, but to all them also that love his appearing. See *2 Tim. iv. 8.* Yes, he it is who will say at last to all his faithful servants, *well done good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of thy Lord!* With a view then to the promised reward, we may well say, our sufficiency is of God, *who hath made us able ministers.*

6. It appears to be *God* who makes men able ministers, because he *claims* this honor as his own prerogative.

Behold, says Christ to his disciples, I send you! *Matt. x. 16.* And go ye into all the world! *Matt. xxviii. 19.* Agreeably to which the apostle *Paul* is said to have been made a minister, according to the gift of the grace given to him by the effectual working of *his power.* *Eph. iii. 7.* And ministers of the new testament are therefore called, *ministers of Christ*, and *ministers of the gospel of the grace of God.*

7. All truly able ministers have been ready to *acknowledge* that they were made so by God.

Their language with one united voice is, *our sufficiency is of God, who hath made us, if we are made, able ministers* of the new testament. And such was the sense our apostle had of the greatness of the privilege conferred on him, in being an *able minister*, that he expresses his gratitude for it in the strongest terms. *I thank Christ Jesus my Lord, 1 Tim. i. 12. who hath ENABLED me, for that HE counted me faithful, PUTTING ME into the ministry!* And again, *Eph. iii. 8. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is THIS GRACE GIVEN, that I should preach amongst the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ!* And have we not all, my brethren, reason to be astonished, that *unto us* such grace as this should be given? Behold what manner of love! *Not unto us, not unto us, but to thy name be all the glory!*

It only remains, in the

III. And last place, that I close the subject with some suitable improvement.

1. Let ministers seriously consider, from what has been said, whose they are, and to whom they should therefore be devoted.

You are, my brethren, the Lord's. You are his *ministers*, ministers of the new testament, not of the law or letter, but of the spirit, the gospel. And he it is who has given you all the accomplishments
you

you possess for the discharge of this office. Should not the thought inspire you with a holy zeal and ardor in your great and important work! Should not he that ministreth, diligently wait upon his ministry, and be ready to spend and be spent in his master's service? A better, a more useful, or a more honorable employ we cannot be engaged in; nor can we serve a better master. Happy is it, when the ministers of Christ are able to say, as the apostles of old did, *none of us liveth to himself*. The *love of Christ* constraineth us.

2. Is it God that makes men able ministers, should not this consideration inspire the ministers of Christ with the deepest *humility*?

To be made *embassadors for Christ*, able ministers of the new testament, is a high honor, a distinguishing privilege indeed! But what have we that we have not *received*? And *who* is it that hath *made* us to differ? Is not *all* our sufficiency of God? Let him then that glorieth, glory only in the Lord!

3. Is it God who makes able ministers, to him then let ministers apply for those divine aids which are necessary to enable them successfully to discharge the duties of their office.

It is his grace alone that is sufficient for us. Our sufficiency is of God; to him therefore let us look, on him depend! He giveth grace, and more grace. Ask and you shall receive.

4. Is

4. Is it God that makes able ministers, to him then should we look for them.

They are his gift, and to him therefore should we apply for them. It is HE who *hath made* in time past, and it is he only who can make now *able ministers*. Unless the *Lord* build the house, the builders labor in vain. All *our* attempts to raise and qualify men for the ministry, without his blessing, will be in vain and to no purpose. Whatever means and second causes he may see fit to make use of, it is he alone that is able to render any of them effectual. To all our other endeavors then, let us in an especial manner add *servent prayer* to God, that HE would send forth faithful laborers into his harvest, and effectually succeed, every pious attempt to furnish the churches with a succession of able ministers!

5. Is it God that makes men able ministers, let those then who are blessed with such ministers be thankful to God for them.—How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that bring good tidings, that publish salvation! Is the *new testament* a blessing, how great a blessing then must it be to have *able ministers*, to explain and unfold it to us! Let us then render unto the Lord, according to the benefit we have received from him.

6. Does God, as we have seen, make men able ministers, by owning and blessing suitable means for that purpose, as well as by communicating to them the supernatural gifts of his spirit
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and grace; then surely, to assist and encourage pious persons in the pursuit of useful knowledge, must be a service *highly pleasing* to God, and *profitable* to men.*

On

* Here, I would beg leave to present my readers with the following extract from Dr. Mosheim, one of the most accurate and faithful of all our ecclesiastical historians.

“The Christians took all possible care to accustom their children to the study of the scriptures, and to instruct them in the doctrines of their holy religion; and SCHOOLS were every where erected for this purpose even from the *very commencement* of the Christian church. We must not, however, confound the schools designed only for *children*, with the *gymnasia* or ACADEMIES of the ancient Christians, erected in several large cities, in which persons of riper years, especially such as aspired to be *public teachers*, were instructed in the different branches, both of human learning and of *sacred* erudition. We may, *undoubtedly*, attribute to the *apostles themselves*, and their injunctions to their disciples, those *excellent establishments*, in which the youth destined to the holy ministry, received an education suitable to the solemn office they were to undertake. See 2 Tim. ii. 2. St. JOHN erected a school of this kind at *Ephesus*, and one of the same nature was founded by POLYCARP, at *Smyrna*. See IRENEUS, *ad Hæres. lib. 2. cap. 22. p. 148. ed. Massuet.* EUSEBIUS, *Hist. eccles. lib. v. cap. xx. p. 188.* But none of these schools were in greater repute than that which was established at *Alexandria*, which was commonly called the *catechetical school*, and is generally supposed to have been erected by St. MARK. The Alexandrian school was renowned for a succession of learned doctors, as we find by the accounts of EUSEBIUS and St. JEROM; for, after St. MARK,—PANTENUS, CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS, ORIGEN, and many others taught in it the doctrine of the gospel, and rendered it a famous seminary for Christian philosophy and religious knowledge. There were also at *Antioch*, *Cæsarea*, *Edeffa*, and in several other places, schools of the same nature, though not all of equal reputation. See the disserta-

On this occasion permit me, my honored friends and brethren, to congratulate you upon that pious and well-regulated zeal you have been enabled to discover, by forming yourselves into a society with this view, and for this purpose. You have the honor, the happiness, of having laid the foundation of a truly noble and excellent institution. An institution, which hitherto hath been favored with the indulgent smiles of an approving providence, and for which, an unborn posterity will, I am persuaded, rise up and call you blessed. Go on, and prosper. Bless God who hath given you an ability, and who hath given you a disposition, thus to exert yourselves in his service, and for his sake! Our blessed master takes all you do, to the *least* of his servants, as done unto *himself*. Hail then, ye highly favored of the Lord! You are admitted to the distinguishing honor, of being *workers together with him*, and may hope at last to be owned and acknowledged by him!

The nature and design of this institution is so properly and fully explained already, in the printed

tion of SCHMIDIUS, de *Schola Catechetica Alexandrina*; as also AULISIUS, *Delle Scuole Sacre*, book ii. ch. i. 2. p. 5—17. and ch. xxi. p. 92. The curious reader will find a learned account of the more famous Christian schools in the eastern parts, at *Edefsa*, *Nisibis*, and *Seleucia*. and, indeed, of the ancient schools in general, in ASSEMANUS's *Biblioth. Orient. Clement. Vaticanæ*, tom. iii. par. II. p. 914—919.

Mosheim's *Eccles. Hist.* qto, edit. p. 54, 55.

ed account of it, that it is almost needless to add any thing more concerning it. But as it will naturally be expected I should say something concerning the institution upon the present occasion, I beg leave to make the following observations respecting it.

1. It was established, I believe I may with the strictest truth affirm, with no mercenary or secular views to the interest of any individuals concerned in it, but with a single eye to the glory of God, the good of his church, and the interest of religion in the world. We seek not ourselves, our own honor, interest or reputation, but the things of Christ and religion.

2. Nor is it the design of this institution to introduce *carnal* and unregenerate men into the ministry. The introducing of such persons into the ministry, persons who are destitute of the very essentials of Christianity, as well as of all the truly spiritual qualifications for the work of the ministry, has been, as I have before observed, the bane of the christian church. But let it not be imagined such persons are introduced into the ministry, only out of *seminaries of learning*. Sad experience furnishes us with too many dreadful instances of those who have been violent opposers of *learning*, and yet have given shocking proofs of their *carnality* and *want of piety*.—The churches of Christ, whose province it is to *call* persons to the ministry, and to judge of their qualifications for

it, should be particularly careful as to this matter. They should encourage none but such as are *just, sober, temperate*, and who have a *good report* of them that are without. It is however from the churches this institution receives its candidates, and if any of them therefore should appear to be carnal and unregenerate men, to the churches, not to this institution the *blame* belongs.

3. Nor is it, I would further observe, the design of this institution, to be a supplement to the spirit of God's teachings, as though he was not sufficient to qualify men for the ministry, without the assistance of his creatures. We know he is. But we also know he usually works by *means*, and such means as are suited to the end, and that we may hope therefore to be made use of, as instruments in his hand, to promote and carry on his great and important designs. We are not so vain and impious as to imagine we can *mend* or *improve* his work. But does it follow, because we cannot improve the work of God, that therefore God cannot work by us as his instruments ?

4. Nor is it the design of this institution to discourage the calling of those who appear to be fitted by God for usefulness in his church, though they may not have an opportunity to acquire the advantages of learning, whereby their sphere of usefulness might be enlarged. There are many of this character, as I have observed already, who are burning and shining lights in the church,
and

and whom we therefore greatly respect and honor, and to whom we are ready to give all the countenance and encouragement they can reasonably desire. But,

5. The intention of this society is to improve the minds of those pious persons who are recommended by the churches to its patronage, by proper cultivation, reading, study and conversation. To instruct them into the knowledge of the languages in which the scriptures were written, to give them a just view of language in general, and of their own in particular, to teach them to express themselves with propriety upon whatever subject they discourse of, and to lead them into an acquaintance with those several branches of literature in general, which may be serviceable to them, with the blessing of God, in the exercise of their ministry. In a word, the design of this institution is to contribute what we can, towards the church and world's having *able ministers* of the new testament. Such as may be qualified to explain, illustrate, defend, improve and enforce divine truths and duties, and to put to silence the ignorance of silly men. Such as, being in a measure judges of words or language, shall be able to seek and find out acceptable words, and thus more fully and agreeably convey to their hearers the knowledge of divine things, and approve themselves workmen, that *need not* be ashamed, *rightly dividing* the word of truth, and giving to *every one* his portion

tion in due season.—And surely this is a most useful and laudable service, highly worthy the encouragement and countenance of all the genuine friends of Christ and religion. May we not then hope, that when this infant institution is more fully known, and the design of it better understood, it *will be* more generally encouraged and promoted. It is, I am sensible, to the *Lord* of the harvest we are to look for faithful laborers, for the residue of the spirit is with him; but then we should also remember, that the days of miracles are at an end, and that God is pleased to make use of his creatures as instruments in his hand for the accomplishment of his own purposes. Whilst therefore we daily *pray*, as we are taught to do, *thy kingdom come!* it becomes us at the same time to do all we can in our respective spheres, to promote the advancement of this kingdom in the world. So may we hope, under a divine blessing, to see religion revive and lift up its drooping head, and the knowledge of God, of Christ and divine things, spread and cover the face of the earth, as the waters do the bottom of the seas. Halcyon days! Who, but must rejoice in the expectation and prospect of them! And do we wish to see such happy times? Let us then cheerfully contribute all that is in our power to forward their delightful approach;—leaving the event to HIM, of whom, and through whom are all things, and to whom belongs ALL THE GLORY!

